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The Doctrine of the Mean 中庸

Translated by A. Charles Muller

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A. The Text

天命之謂性。率性之謂道。修道之謂教。

1. What Heaven confers is called “nature.” Accordance with this nature is called the Way. Cultivating the Way is called “education.”

道也者、不可須臾離也、可離非道也。是故君子戒慎乎其所不睹、恐懼乎其所不聞。

That which is called Way cannot be separated from for an instant. What **can** be separated from is not the Way. Therefore the Noble Man is cautious in the place where he is not seen, and apprehensive in the place where he is not heard.

莫見乎隱、莫顯乎微。故君子慎其獨也。

Nothing is more visible than the hidden, and nothing is more apparent than the subtle. Therefore the Noble Man is cautious when he is alone.

喜、怒、哀、樂之未發、謂之中。發而皆中節、謂之和。中也者、天下之大本也。和也者、天下之達道也。致中和、天地位焉、萬物育焉。

When joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure have not yet arisen, it is called the Mean (中 centeredness, equilibrium). When they arise to their appropriate levels, it is called “harmony” 和. The Mean is the great root of all-under-heaven. “Harmony” is the penetration of the Way through all-under-heaven. When the Mean and Harmony are actualized, Heaven and Earth are in their proper positions, and the myriad things are nourished.

B. The Commentary

仲尼曰、君子中庸。小人反中庸。君子之中庸也、君子而時中。小人之中庸也、小人而無忌憚也。

2. Confucius said: “The Noble Man actualizes the mean; the petty man goes against it. The Noble Man actualizes the mean because he is always with it; the inferior man's non-actualization is due to his heedlessness.”

子曰。中庸其至矣乎。民鮮能久矣。

3. How far-reaching the mean is! That is why those who are able to keep it for long are few.

子曰。道之不行也、我知之矣。知者過之、愚者不及也。道之不明也、我知之矣。賢者過之、不肖者不及也。人莫不飲食也、鮮能知味也。

4. Confucius said: “I know why the Way is not practiced. The intelligent go beyond it and the dull do not reach it. I know why the Way is not disclosed. The ‘good’ go beyond it and the unworthy do not reach it. There is no one who does not eat or drink, but there are few who really have ‘taste.’”

子曰。道其不行矣夫。

5. Confucius said: “What a pity! The way is not followed.”

子曰。舜其大知也與。舜好問而好察邇言。隱惡而揚善、執其兩端、用其中於民、其斯以爲舜乎。

6. Confucius said: “(Emperor) Shun was so wise! He liked to question people and delighted in listening to everyday speech. He would cover people's bad points and showcase their goodness. He snatched up their excesses and facilitated their balanced nature for the benefit of all. It was in this way that Shun made himself into what he was.”

子曰。人皆曰、予知、驅而納諸罟獲陷阱之中、而莫之知辟也。人皆曰、予知、擇乎中庸、而不能期月守也。

7. Confucius said: “Everybody says ‘I know,’ but they are driven forward, becoming ensnared in traps and falling into pits without knowing how to avoid them. Everybody says ‘I know,’ but in intending the actualization of the mean, they are not able to stay with it for a full month.”

子曰。回之爲人也、擇乎中庸、得一善、則拳拳服膺而弗失之矣。

8. Confucius said: “(Yan) Hui was the kind of person who grasped the mean in such a way that, attaining to a certain goodness, he would cleave to it firmly and never lose it.”

子曰。天下國家可均也、爵祿可辭也、白刃可蹈也、中庸不可能也。

9. Confucius said: “You might be able to put in order the whole country, kingdoms and clans; decline rank and merit-pay and tread on bare swords, yet still be incapable of actualizing the mean.”

[Comment] The performance of phenomenal wonders cannot be compared with the accomplishment of actualizing the mean.

子路問強。子曰。南方之強與。北方之強與。抑而強與。寬柔以教、不報無道、南方之強也、君子居之。衽金革、死而不厭、北方之強也、而強者居之。故君子而和而不流、強哉矯。中立而不倚、強哉矯。國有道、不變塞焉、強哉矯。國無道、至死不變、強哉矯。

10. Zilu asked about strength. Confucius said: “Do you mean the strength of the South, the strength of the North, or the strength of self-mastery? To be broadminded and gentle in teaching and not rashly punish wrongdoing is the strength of the South. The Noble Man abides in this. To be able to make a bed of weapons and armor and die without grief—this is the strength of the North. The forceful are at home in this.”

“Therefore the Noble Man is easygoing without getting sloppy. How correct his strength is! He stands in the center without leaning to either side. How correct his strength is! When the Way is manifest in the land, he is unwavering in his support of it. How correct his strength is! When the Way is not manifest in the land, he will not sell himself out, even until death. How correct his strength is!”

子曰。素隱行怪、後世有述焉、吾弗爲之矣。君子遵道而行、半涂而廢、吾弗能已矣。君子依乎中庸、遁世不見知而不悔、唯聖者能之。君子之道費而隱。夫婦之愚、可以與知焉、及其至也、雖聖人亦有所不知焉。夫婦之不肖、可以能行焉、及其至也。雖聖人亦有所不能焉。天地之大也、人猶有所憾、故君子語大、天下莫能載焉。語

小、天下莫能破焉。詩云。鳶飛戾天、魚躍于淵。言其上下察也。君子之道、造端乎夫婦、及其至也、察乎天地。

11. Confucius said: “When you study the occult and perform miracles, later generations always talk about it. This I won't do.”

“As a Noble Man, to go according to the Way and abandon it half way—this I certainly cannot do.”

“Then there is the Noble Man, who depends on his actualization of the mean, hides himself from the world such that he is unseen and unknown, and has no regrets about it. Only a sage can do this.”

The Way of the Noble Man functions everywhere, yet is inconspicuous. Average men and women, even if ignorant, know something of it; yet even the sage cannot know it completely. Average men and women, even though lacking in ability are able to practice to some extent; yet even the sage cannot practice it perfectly.

As vast as the universe is, people still have dissatisfaction. When the Noble Man calls it “vast,” he means it is too large to be grasped. When he speaks of its smallness, he means that it is something that cannot be further broken down.

The *Book of Odes* says: “The hawk flies high in the sky; the fish dances in the deep.” This means that its height and its depth are both observable. The Way of the Noble Man starts with the common people, but in its absoluteness, it is observed throughout the universe.

子曰。道不遠人。人之爲道而遠人、不可以爲道。詩云。伐柯伐柯、其則不遠。執柯以伐柯、睨而視之、猶以爲遠。故君子以人治人、改而止。忠恕違道不遠、施諸己而不愿、亦勿施於人。君子之道四、丘未能一焉。所求乎子以事父、未能也。所求乎臣以事君、未能也。所求乎弟以事兄、未能也。所求乎朋友先施之、未能也。庸德之行、庸言之謹、有所不足、不敢不勉、有餘不敢盡。言顧行、行顧言、君子胡不慥慥爾。

13. Confucius said: “The Way is not something separate from man. If you practice a Way that is apart from man, this cannot the Way. The Book of Odes says:”

Carving axe handles

One after another

They differ little from the original sample

Taking one to carve another.

When you compare them,

There are still differences.

Therefore the Noble Man treats people as human beings, and once they have corrected themselves, he lets them be. Being sincere and fair to all, though this is different from the Way, it are not far from it. This means “not doing to others what you don't want done to yourself.” There are four general ways that this can be characterized, one of which I ¹ have been able to fully practice:

- (1) Treating my father as I expect my son to treat me.
- (2) Treating my ruler as I expect my ministers to treat me.
- (3) Treating my older brothers as I expect my younger brothers to treat me.
- (4) Treating my friends as I expect my friends to treat me.

In the putting into practice of virtue or the taking care of speech, if there is somewhere where I am deficient, I certainly endeavor further. If there is excess, I do not dare to merely expend it. His words reflecting his actions, his actions reflecting his words—how can this Noble Man not be sincere through and through?

君子素其位而行、不愿乎其外。素富貴、行乎富貴。素貧賤、行乎貧賤。素夷狄、行乎夷狄。素患難、行乎患難。君子無入而不自得焉。在上位不陵下、在下位不援上、正己而不求於人、則無怨。上不怨天、下不尤人。故君子居易以俟命、小人行險以徼幸。

14. The Noble Man acts accepting his own situation. He does not hope to be somewhere else. When he is in a position of fame and fortune, he acts within fame and fortune. When in a position of poverty and low status, he acts within poverty and low status. When dwelling with uncultured tribes, he acts as if he is with uncultured tribes. When he is in stress and difficulty, he acts from within stress and difficulty. There is no place where the Noble Man is not completely himself.

When in a high position, he does not step on those below him. When in a low position, he does not drag down those above him. Correcting yourself and not expecting things from others, you will not create resentments. You will not resent Heaven above, nor blame men below.

The Noble Man abides in change and awaits his destiny. The inferior man practices manipulation and prays for luck.

子曰。射有似乎君子、失諸正鵠、反求諸其身。君子之道、辟如行遠必自邇、辟如登高必自卑。詩曰。妻子好合、如鼓瑟琴。兄弟既翕、和樂且耽。宜爾室家、樂爾妻帑。

The Master said: “Practicing archery is like practicing to be a Noble Man. When you miss the bulls-eye, you look for the error in yourself.”

15. The Way of the Noble Man can be compared to traveling: To go far, you must start from close by. It can be compared to climbing: To go high, you must start from down low. The *Book of Odes* says:

The Happy union with wife and children

Is like the music of lutes and harps

When siblings all get along

The harmony is entrancing.

So make your household good

And enjoy your wife and children.

子曰。父母其順矣乎。

The Master said: “Husband and wife should follow each other.”

子曰。鬼神之爲德、其盛矣乎。視之而弗見、聽之而弗聞、體物而不可遺。使天下之人齊明盛服、以承祭祀、洋洋乎如在其上、如在其左右。詩曰。‘神之格思、不可度思。矧可射思。’夫微之顯、誠之不可掩如此夫。

16. Confucius said: “The overabundance of the power of spiritual beings is truly amazing! Looking for them, they cannot be seen. Listening for them, they cannot be heard. There is nothing that they do not embody. They cause the people of the world to fast for purification, and wear beautiful clothes in order to participate at the sacrifices. They are overflowing, seeming to be above, seeming to be on the left and on the right. The *Book of Odes* says: ‘Trying to investigate the spirits, we cannot reach them. How could we possibly grasp them with our thoughts?’ The manifestation of the subtle and the inconcealability of sincerity is like this.”

子曰。舜其大孝也與。德爲聖人、尊爲天子、富有四海之內。宗廟饗之、子孫保之。故大德必得其位、必得其祿、必得其名、必得其壽。故天之生物、必因其材而篤焉。故栽者培之、傾者覆之。詩曰。嘉樂君子、憲憲令德。宜民宜人、受祿于天。保佑命之、自天申之。故大德者必受命。

17. What a good son was Shun (the sage emperor)! His virtue was that of a sage, he was venerated as an emperor. His wealth included everything within the four seas. He is sacrificed to in the ancestral temple, and his sons and grandsons have preserved his name.

Therefore we can say that the greatly virtuous always attain their appropriate position, always receive their proper reward, always get their recognition and are always long-lived.

We can also know that Heaven develops each thing according to its preparation. Thus, Heaven nourishes the growing sprout, and throws down the leaning tree. The *Book of Odes* says:

Joyful is the Prince

With the power of his own correctness

He harmonized those far and near

He received his reward from Heaven

Who protected him, helped him

And gave him the mandate

Which he in turn enhanced.

Thus, the greatly virtuous always receive the Mandate of Heaven.

子曰。無憂者其惟文王乎。以王季爲父、以武王爲子、父作之、子述之。武王纘大王、王季、文王之緒、壹戎衣而有天下、身不失天下之顯名。尊爲天子、富有四海之內。宗廟饗之、子孫保之。武王末受命、周公成文、武之德、追王大王、王季、上祀先公以天子之禮。斯禮也、達乎諸侯、大夫及士、庶人。父爲大夫、子爲士、葬以大夫、祭以士。父爲士、子爲大夫、葬以士、祭以大夫。期之喪、達乎大夫。三年之喪、達乎天子。父母之喪、無貴賤、一也。

18. Confucius said: “The only one who didn't suffer from grief was King Wen, since his father was King Chi and his son was King Wu. His father set him up and his son continued his ways. King Wu merely extended what had been handed down from Kings Tai, Ji and Wen. Once he put on his armor, he took control of the whole realm and he never failed to live up to the great reputation the people accorded to him. He was respected as an emperor; his wealth included all within the four seas. The ancestral halls make offerings to him, and his sons and grandsons have preserved his name.”

King Wu received the Mandate of Heaven late in life. The Duke of Zhou consummated the virtue of Wen and Wu. Following in the ways of Kings T'ai and Chi, he sacrificed to the former princes with the ceremony proper to an emperor, and spread this ceremony to all the nobles, ministers, officers and the common people. If the father was a minister and the son an officer, then the funeral ceremony would be

for a minister, and the sacrifices for an officer. If the father was an officer and the son was a minister, he would be buried as an officer and sacrificed to as a minister. The one year's mourning applied up to the ministers, but the three-year mourning applied up the emperor. In the mourning for parents, there was no distinction according to class.

子曰。武王、周公、其達孝矣乎。夫孝者。善繼人之志、善述人之事者也。春、秋修其祖廟、陳其宗器、設其裳衣、薦其時食。宗廟之禮、所以序昭穆也。序爵、所以辨貴賤也。序事、所以辨賢也。旅酬下爲上、所以逮賤也。燕毛、所以序齒也。踐其位、行其禮、奏其樂、敬其所尊、愛其所親、事死如事生、事亡如事存、孝之至也。郊社之禮、所以事上帝也。宗廟之禮、所以祀乎其先也。明乎郊社之禮、禘嘗之義、治國其如示諸掌乎。

19. Confucius said: “How completely King Wu and the Duke of Zhou actualized their filial piety! Through filial piety, they correctly passed down the wills of their forefathers and correctly transmitted their works. In spring and autumn, they cleaned the ancestral temple, laid out the sacrificial vessels, dressed up in the ceremonial outfit and prepared the seasonal foods.”

Using the ritual of the ancestral temple, they ordered the ancestral lineages.

By rank, they distinguished high and low classes; by works, they distinguished goodness.

By having the lower classes offer the toast to the upper classes, they kept the lower classes involved.

By hair color, they distinguished seniority. Each taking their positions, they carried out the ritual, played the music, respected the venerable, loved their relatives. They served the dead as if they were alive, and they served those not present as if they were there. Herein they brought filial piety to its highest level.

They used the Winter and Summer festival to make offerings to the Lord-on-High, and used the rituals on the ancestral temple to make offerings to the ancestors. He who could completely disclose the meaning of the Winter and Summer sacrifices, and the great Imperial sacrifice, could govern the country as easily as if he were pointing to the palm of his hand.

哀公問政。子曰。文、武之政、布在方策、其人存、則其政舉。其人亡、則其政息。人道敏政、地道敏樹。夫政也者、蒲盧也。故爲政在人、取人以身、修身以道、修道以仁。仁者人也、親親爲大。義者宜也、尊賢爲大。親親之殺、尊賢之等、禮所生也。在下位不獲乎上、民不可得而治矣。筆君子不可以不修身。思修身、不可以不事親。思事親、不可以不知人。思知人、不可以不知天。天下之達道五、所以行之者三、曰。君臣也、父子也、夫婦也、昆弟也、朋友之交也、五者天下之達道也。知仁勇三者、天下之達德也、所以行之者一也。或生而知之、或學而知之、或困而知之、及其知之、一也。或安而行之、或利而行之、或勉強而行之、及其成功、一也。

20. The Duke of Ai asked about government. Confucius said: “The records of the governments of Wen and Wu are on the ancient tablets. When they had the right people, the government functioned, and when they didn't have the right people, government failed. When people are right, the government flourishes; when the ground is right, plants flourish; the governments of Wen and Wu flourished like fast-growing weeds.”

Therefore, the skillful handling of government is contingent upon having the right people. You attract the right people by your own character. You cultivate your character through the Way and you manifest the Way by means of *ren*. *ren* is “humanity”² and its most obvious function is in love for relatives. “Justice” 義 means “setting things right” and its most obvious function is in venerating the Good. The differing levels in loving relatives and venerating the good are expressed through propriety.

Thus, if your rank is low, and you do not have the support of those in power, you cannot hope to have an influence on government. Therefore the Noble Man cannot but cultivate his character.

Wanting to cultivate his character, he cannot do it without serving his parents. Wanting to serve his parents, he cannot do it without understanding others. Wanting to understand others, he cannot do it without understanding Heaven.

There are five pervasive 達 relationships in this world, which are carried out in three ways. The relationships are those between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother, and between friends. The three ways of practice are wisdom, *ren* and courage, but they are practiced in unison.

Some are born knowing it; some know it by learning and some have to struggle to know it. Nonetheless, the knowledge is the same.

Some practice it by being comfortable within it; some practice it by benefitting from it; and some have to struggle to practice it. But when the practice is perfected, it is the same.

子曰。好學近乎知、力行近乎仁、知恥近乎勇。知斯三者、則知所以修身。知所以修身、則知所以治人。知所以治人、則知所以治天下國家矣。凡爲天下國家有九經、曰。修身也、尊賢也、親親也、敬大臣也、體群臣也、子庶民也、來百工也、柔遠人也、懷諸侯也。修身則道立、尊賢則不惑、親親則諸父昆弟不怨、敬大臣則不眩、體群臣則士之報禮重、子庶民則百姓勸、來百工則財用足、柔遠人則四方歸之、懷諸侯則天下畏之。齊明盛服、非禮不動、所以修身也。去讒遠色、賤貨而貴德、所以勸賢也。尊其位、重其祿、同其好惡、所以勸親親也。官盛任使、所以勸大臣也。忠信重祿、所以勸士也。時使薄斂、所以勸百姓也。日省月試、既廩稱事、所以勸百工也。送往迎來、嘉善而矜不能、所以柔遠人也。繼絕世、舉廢國、治亂持危、朝聘以時、厚往而薄來、所以懷諸侯也。凡爲天下國家有九經、所以行之者一也。

Confucius said: “Loving study, you approach wisdom; loving energetic practice, you approach *ren*. Understanding shame, you approach courage. If you understand these three, you know how to polish your character; knowing how to polish your character, you know how to handle others; knowing how to handle others, you know how to govern a state or clan.”

In general, in the handling of the realm, a state or a clan, there are nine basic patterns of treatment. These are: polishing your own character; venerating the Good; caring for your relatives; respecting the high ministers; making the lower ministers feel like they have a significant role; treating the common people as your children; making the artisans feel welcome; treating foreign guests gently and embracing the nobles.

Polishing your character, you set up your own Way. Venerating the Good, you are not deluded. Caring for your relatives, then your fathers, elder and younger brothers will not resent you. Respecting the high ministers, you will not make foolish mistakes. Making the lower ministers feel like they are part of it, they will regard propriety with seriousness. Treating the common people as your children, they will work hard. Making the artisans feel welcome, there will be plenty of commerce. Being gentle to guests from afar, people will flock to you from all directions. If you embrace the nobility, the people will have a healthy fear of them.

Fasting in ceremonial dress, not acting against the norms of propriety; this is how you polish your character. Letting go of slander, freeing yourself from lust, disregarding wealth and prizing virtue: This is how you promote goodness. Respecting their rank, paying them well, going along with their likes and dislikes: this is the way to take care of your relatives. Giving them enough officers to dole out their responsibilities: this is the way to encourage the high ministers. To reward well trustworthiness and loyalty: this is the way to encourage the lower officers. Employing the people around their own farming schedules and taxing them lightly: this is the way to encourage the people. Daily and monthly examining their works and giving merit where due: this is the way to encourage the artisans. Sending out envoys to meet foreign visitors and bestowing kindness and pity on the handicapped: this is the way to be gentle to visitors from afar. To renew their broken lineages, restore their vanquished states, quell their rebellions and protect them from danger; giving them rich presents and expecting little in return: this is how you embrace the nobles.

While altogether there are this nine patterns of treatment, there is a single way to carry out all of them.

“凡事豫則立、不豫則廢。言前定則不跲、事前定則不困、行前定則不疚、道前定則不窮。在下位不獲乎上、民不可得而治矣。獲乎上有道。不信乎朋友、不獲乎上矣。信乎朋友有道。不順乎親、不信乎朋友矣。順乎親有道。反諸身不誠、不順乎親矣。誠身有道。不明乎善、不誠乎身矣。誠者、天之道也。誠之者、人之道也。誠者不勉而中、不思而得、從容中道、聖人也。誠之者、擇善而固執之者也。博學之、審問之、慎思之、明辨之、篤行之。有弗學、學之弗能、弗措也。有弗問、問之弗知、弗措也。有弗思、思之弗得、弗措也。有弗辨、辨之弗明、弗措也、有弗行、行之弗篤、弗措也。人一能之己百之、人十能之己千之。果能此道矣、雖愚必明、雖柔必強。”

In all affairs, if you plan ahead you can be successful, and if you don't plan ahead, you will fail. If you are prepared before you speak, you won't be tongue-tied. If you are prepared before you begin a job, you won't have complications. If you are prepared before you act, you won't have to be sorry. If you are prepared before teaching, you won't run out of material.

Again, if you are in a position of low rank, and you have no influence above, you will have no way of governing people. Even though there is a way of influencing superiors, if your friends don't trust you, you won't be able to influence superiors. Even though there is a way of gaining the trust of your friends, if you have discord with your relatives, you will not be trusted by your friends. Even though there is a way of having harmony with your relatives, if your character is not sincere, you will have discord with your relatives. Even though there is a way to make your character sincere, if you have not awakened to your goodness, you will not be able to make your character sincere.

Sincerity is the Way of Heaven. Making oneself sincere is the Way of Man. If you can be perfectly sincere without effort, without concern regarding its attainment, and walk embracing the Middle Way, you are a sage.

If you are working at making yourself sincere, you must find your goodness and hold fast to it. You must study it broadly, investigate it in detail, deliberate on it carefully, discern it clearly and practice it universally. Where there is a lack in your understanding, or your study has not yet reached the point where it is effective, don't just leave it. When there is something you have investigated, or investigated but not understood, don't just leave it. When there is something that you have considered, or have considered but have not fully grasped, just don't leave it. When there is something that you have not yet discerned, or discerned but not yet clarified, don't just leave it. When there is something you have not yet practiced, or have practiced, but not yet universally, don't just leave it.

If someone else gets it in one try, I will try one hundred times. If someone else gets it in ten tries, I will try one thousand times. If you are able to follow this Way, then even if you are stupid, you will become enlightened. Even if you are weak, you will become strong.

自誠明、謂之性。自明誠、謂之教。誠則明矣、明則誠矣。唯天下至誠、爲能盡其性。能盡其性、則能盡人之性。能盡人之性、則能盡物之性。能盡物之性、則可以贊天地之化育。可以贊天地之化育、則可以與天地參矣。其次致曲。曲能有誠、誠則形、形則著、著則明、明則動、動則變、變則化。唯天下至誠爲能化。至誠之道、可以前知。國家將興、必有禎祥。國家將亡、必有妖孽。見乎蓍龜、動乎四體。禍福將至。善、必先知之。不善、必先知之。故至誠如神。

21. The enlightenment that comes from sincerity is our own nature. The sincerity that comes from enlightenment is called “education.” If you are sincere you will be enlightened. If you are enlightened, you will be sincere.

22. Only the perfectly sincere person can actualize his own essence. Actualizing his own essence, he can fully actualize the essence of others. Fully actualizing the essence of others, he can fully actualize the essence of all things. Being able to fully actualize the essence of all things, he can assist Heaven and Earth in their transformation and sustenance. Able to assist in Heaven and Earth's transformation and sustenance, he forms a trinity with Heaven and Earth.

23. Those of the next level straighten out their own twistedness. Being straightened they can possess sincerity. Having sincerity, they can give form to their character. Their character having form, their sincerity becomes manifest. Being manifest it is luminous, being luminous

it can function. Functioning, it changes; changing, it transforms. Only the most fully actualized sincerity is able to transform people and things.

24. Once you are in the Path of fully actualized sincerity, you have foreknowledge of things. When a nation or clan is about to rise up, there are always omens of their fortune. When a nation or clan is about to fall, there are always omens of their misfortune. It can be seen in the milfoil stalks,³ tortoise shells⁴ and in the movements of the body. When good or evil fortune is imminent, the perfectly sincere person will know without obstruction. With fully actualized sincerity, you are like a god.

誠者自成也、而道自道也。誠者物之終始、不誠無物。是故君子誠之爲貴。誠者非自成己而已也、所以成物也。成己、仁也。成物、知也。性之德也、合外內之道也、故時措之宜也。故至誠無息。不息則久、久則徵、徵則悠遠、悠遠則博厚、博厚則高明。博厚、所以載物也。高明、所以覆物也。悠久、所以成物也。博厚配地、高明配天、悠久無疆。如此者、不見而章、不動而變、無爲而成。

25. Sincerity is just “perfecting” and the Way is just “following.” Sincerity is the beginning and end of all things. Without sincerity there is nothing. Thus the Noble Man values the process of “becoming-sincere.” But sincerity is not “just-perfecting;” it also means “perfecting all things.” To perfect yourself, you need *ren*. To perfect others, you need wisdom. The virtue of our nature is that it is none other than the Way by which inner and outer are merged. Thus we can always use it to set things right.

26. Therefore, fully actualized sincerity is ceaseless. Ceaseless, it is eternal. Eternal, it is apparent. Apparent, it is far-reaching. Far-reaching, it is vast and deep. Vast and deep, it is high and bright. Since it is vast and deep, it can support all things. Since it is high and bright, it can cover all things. Since it is far-reaching and long-lasting, it can accomplish all things. Vastness and depth refer to the Earth. Highness and brightness refer to Heaven. Far-reaching and long-lasting refer to limitlessness. In this way, it is manifest without being seen, it changes without moving, and accomplishes without effort.

天地之道、可壹言而盡也。其爲物不貳、則其生物不測。天地之道、博也厚也、高也明也、悠也久也。今夫天、斯昭昭之多、及其無窮也、日月星辰系焉、萬物覆焉。今夫地、一撮土之多、及其廣厚、載華岳而不重、振河海而不泄、萬物載焉。今夫山、一拳石之多、及其廣大、草木生之、禽獸居之、寶藏興焉。今夫水、一勺之多、及其不測、黿鼉、蛟龍、魚鱉生焉、貨財殖焉。詩云。維天之命、於穆不已。蓋曰天之所以爲天也。“於乎不顯。文王之德之純。”蓋曰文王之所以爲文也、純亦不已。

The Way of Heaven and Earth can be perfectly expressed in a single phrase: “Its appearance as things is not repeated; therefore its production of things is unfathomable.” The Way of Heaven and Earth is vast and deep, high and bright, far-reaching and long-lasting.

Now, Heaven is made of many single lights. But they are infinite; the sun, moon and stars are all suspended in it, and it covers the myriad things.

The Earth is but a collection of numerous handfuls of dirt. But it is vast and deep. It supports Mt. Hua and Mt. Yue without feeling their weight; it contains the seas and rivers without spilling a drop. It supports all things.

The mountains are made of many small stones. But they become high and broad. Plants and trees grow on them, the birds and beasts live on them, and rare gems are stored within them.

The waters are mere collections of many teaspoons. But their depth is unfathomable. Tortoises, alligators, dragons, fish and turtles live there, and all sorts of gems grow there.

The *Book of Odes* says:

The Mandate of the Heavenly Principle

Has no end to its depth.

This is why we call Heaven, “Heaven.”

It also says:

Was it not apparent,

The purity of King Wen's virtue?

This is how Wen made his own character—unceasing in purity.

大哉、聖人之道。洋洋乎發育萬物、峻極于天。優優大哉。禮儀三百、威儀三千、待其人然後行。故曰。苟不至德、至道不凝焉。故君子尊德性而道問學、致廣大而盡精微、極高明而中庸。溫故而知新、敦厚以崇禮。是故居上不驕、爲下不倍。國有道、其言足以興、國無道、其默足以容。詩曰。既明且哲、以保其身。其此之謂與。

27. How great is the Way of the sage! Superabundant, it develops all things, extending up to Heaven. How excellent it is! It embraces the three hundred rules of ceremony, and the three thousand rules of conduct; it waits for the right person and then functions. Hence it is said: “If you do not perfect your virtue, the perfect Way cannot be actualized.” Therefore the Noble Man esteems his virtuous nature and follows the path of inquiry, extending himself in breadth and greatness, penetrating all subtleties, penetrating its height and brilliance, following the course of the actualization of the Mean. He reviews the old and learns the new, thickening his character through the valorization of propriety.

Therefore he abides in a position of power without arrogance, and abides in a low position without being rebellious. When the government is just, he can speak and be praised. When the government is wicked, he can conceal himself by silence. The *Book of Odes* says:

His intelligence and wit

Were his protection.

Does this not reflect the same meaning?

子曰。愚而好自用、賤而好自專、生乎今之世、反古之道。如此者、災及其身者也。非天子、不議禮、不制度、不考文。今天下車同軌、書同文、行同倫。雖有其位、苟無其德、不敢作禮樂焉。雖有其德、苟無其位、亦不敢作禮樂焉。

28. Confucius said: “To be ignorant and like to act as you will; to be of low rank and ignore all the rules; to be living in the present and be following the norms of the past: all these will bring you trouble.”

If you are not the emperor, you cannot determine the rules of propriety, set weights and measures, or create ideographs. In the present realm, carriages have the same axle-widths, documents are written with the same characters and people follow the same norms of conduct.

But even if you are emperor, if you lack virtue, you cannot presume to create ritual or music. And even if you possess sufficient virtue, but you are not in the position of emperor, you cannot presume to create ritual or music.

子曰。吾說夏禮、杞不足徵也。吾學殷禮、有宋存焉。吾學周禮、今用之、吾從周。王天下有三重焉、其寡過矣乎。上焉者雖善無徵、無徵不信、不信民弗從。下焉者雖善不尊、不尊不信、不信民弗從。故君子之道本諸身、徵諸庶民、考諸三王而不繆、建諸天地而不悖、質諸鬼神而無疑、百世以俟聖人而不惑。質諸鬼神而無疑、知天也。百世以俟聖人而不惑、知人也。是故君子動而世爲天下道、行而世爲天下法、言而世爲天下則。遠之則有望、近之則不厭。詩曰。在彼無惡、在此無射。庶幾夙夜、以永終譽。君子未有不如此而蚤有譽於天下者也。

Confucius said: “I can describe the Xia rituals, but the documents from Qi cannot verify it. I have learned the Yin rituals, and they are still preserved in the Song. I have learned the Zhou rituals, which are still in use. I follow the Zhou.”

29. In ruling the realm there are three essentials through which one can lessen his mistakes. ⁵

If you are in a position of rank, even if you are good, if your goodness is not evident, you will not be trusted. Not being trusted, the people will not follow you. If you lack rank, then you will not be respected. Lacking respect, you will not be trusted. Without trust the

people will not follow you.⁶

Therefore in the Noble Man's practice of his Way, he starts with himself and then manifests his character to all the people, such that when he contemplates the ways of the three former sage-kings, he cannot feel any shame. He is established between Heaven and Earth without any discord. He presents himself before the spirits of his ancestors without doubting. He waits for a hundred generations for a sage to appear without confusion.

If you can present yourself to the ancestral spirits without doubting, you know Heaven. If you can wait a hundred generations for the appearance of a sage, you know human beings. Therefore, the people regard the movement of the Noble Man as the Way of the world. They regard his actions as the norm of the world. They regard his words as the pattern for the world. When they are away from him, they long for him. When they are near him, they never get tired of him. The *Book of Odes* says:

When he is away, he is not hated.

When he is here, he is not disliked.

In every situation, from morning to night,

Their praise of him is unceasing.

There has never been a Noble Man who gained rapid recognition from the world and who was not like this.

仲尼祖述堯、舜、憲章文、武。上律天時、下襲水土。辟如天地之無不持載、無不覆幬、辟如四時之錯行、如日月之代明。萬物并育而不相害、道并行而不相悖、小德川流、大德敦化、此天地之所以爲大也。

30. Confucius transmitted the legacy of (sage-emperors) Yao and Shun and modeled his character on that of (sage-kings) Wen and Wu. He was ruled by the Heavenly seasons from above, and combined the Earth and Waters below. He was like Heaven and Earth, which have nothing they do not support, and nothing they do not cover. His function was like the revolution of the four seasons, the alternation of sun and moon. He nourishes the myriad things and they grow up together without harming each other, and they follow their courses simultaneously without interfering with each other. His smaller power is like the rivers and streams. His great power is seen in deep transformations. This is why Heaven and Earth are called “great.”

唯天下至聖、爲能聰明睿知、足以有臨也。寬裕溫柔、足以有容也。發強剛毅、足以有執也。齊莊中正、足以有敬也。文理密察、足以有別也。溥博淵泉、而時出之。溥博如天、淵泉如淵。見而民莫不敬、言而民莫不信、行而民莫不說。是以聲名洋溢乎中國、施及蠻貊。舟車所至、人力所通、天之所覆、地之所載、日月所照、霜露所隊。凡有血氣者、莫不尊親、故曰配天。

31. Only the perfect sage of the realm possesses the acumen, sharpness and insight necessary for overseeing things, and at the same time has enough generosity, open-mindedness, warmth and flexibility to accept everything. He also has enough energy, strength, firmness and gumption to maintain what he has and enough self-awareness, gravity, centeredness and correctness to be respected and enough refinement, principle, depth and analytical ability to discriminate.

Extremely vast, unfathomably deep—he uses his abilities according to the situation. As vast as Heaven, as deep as an abyss, when he shows himself, there are none who do not respect him. When he speaks, there are none who do not believe him. When he acts, there are not who do not appreciate him. Therefore you can hear his name overflowing from the central kingdoms out to the uncivilized regions. Wherever boats and wagons go, wherever human power can reach to; in every place supported by the Earth; those places illuminated by the sun and moon; wherever dew and frost fall; wherever there are breathing beings, there are none who do not respect him and cherish him. Therefore he is associated with “Heaven.”

唯天下至誠、爲能經綸天下之大經、立天下之大本、知天地之化育。夫焉有所倚？肫肫其仁。淵淵其淵。浩浩其天。苟不固聰明聖知達天德者、其孰能知之。

32. Only that person who has fully actualized sincerity is able to adjust the strings of the Great Net of the World; is able to establish himself in the Great Root of the World; is able to understand the transformations and the nurturing of Heaven and Earth. So sincere is his *ren*; so unfathomable is his depth; so vast is his spaciousness.

Who is able to understand this, but one who has the firm, acute, luminous sagely intelligence—who is permeated with Heavenly Virtue?

詩曰。衣錦尚絅、惡其文之著也。故君子之道、闇然而日章。小人之道、的然而日亡。君子之道。淡而不厭、簡而文、溫而理、知遠之近、知風之自、知微之顯、可與入德矣。

33. The *Book of Odes* says:

She covered her brocade gown

With a plain robe.

She did not want to show off her finery. Therefore the Noble Man acts in a way such that he conceals himself, yet every day gains in luminosity. The inferior man shows himself and every day loses luminosity. The Way of the Noble Man is tasteless, yet you never get sick of it. Simple, yet refined; warm-hearted, yet principled. He knows the closeness of the distant, knows the origin of customs. He knows the manifestation of the subtle and can enter into virtue.

詩云。潛雖伏矣、亦孔之昭。故君子內省不疚、無惡於志。君子所不可及者、其唯人之所不見乎。

The *Book of Odes* says:

Though the fish dive to the bottom

They can be seen.

Hence the Noble Man, finding no perversity within himself, has no evil in his intentions. Those things that the Noble Man is unable to attain to are exactly the things that others cannot perceive.

詩云。相在爾室、尚不愧于屋漏。故君子不動而敬、不言而信。

The *Book of Odes* says:

While in your own room,

You should not be ashamed if it were

Opened to the world.

Therefore the Noble Man does not move, and yet is respected. He does not speak, and yet is believed.

詩曰。奏假無言、時靡有爭。是故君子不賞而民勸、不怒而民威於鈇鉞。

The *Book of Odes* says:

Make your offerings without words,

And there will never be any disagreement.

Therefore the Noble Man receives no awards, yet the people promote him. He is not angry, yet they are more in awe of him than they are of lethal weapons.

詩曰。不顯惟德。百辟其刑之。是故君子篤恭而天下平。

The *Book of Odes* says:

Only if you don't show it

Can you develop virtue.

All the princes are constrained by this.

Therefore the Noble Man, through his generosity and courtesy, pacifies the realm.

詩曰。予懷明德、不大聲以色。 子曰。聲色之於以化民、末也。詩曰。德輶如毛、毛猶有倫。上天之載、無聲無臭、至矣。

The *Book of Odes* says:

I cherish shining virtue

Not big noises and flashy colors.

Confucius said: “In terms of transforming people, sounds and appearances don't amount to much. The *Book of Odes* says:”

Virtue is as light as a hair,

Yet even a hair possesses the great principles.

In the functions of Supreme Heaven, there are no sounds or smells.

It is “perfect.”

Notes

1. Confucius.
2. There is a pun here, since “humanity” is also pronounced *ren*. Thus, in Chinese, this phrase says “*ren* 仁 is *ren*.”
3. Used in *Yijing* divination.
4. An ancient method of divination where tortoise shells were heated over a fire until they cracked. The cracks were read according to their patterns to diagnose a situation.
5. At this point in the text, one would expect a clear enumeration of three essential points. But following this are only a set of two, followed by a set of four. James Legge and Wing-tsit Chan, following Zhuxi, say that these three essentials should be the ceremonies, regulations and formation of ideographs mentioned in the prior passage. This judgment may be questioned, since in Confucian texts, errors in rulership are generally shortcomings in the personal character or errors in judgment on moral issues. Since these are three essentials of rulership, we might look to the end of section 20 above, which says: “Loving study, you approach wisdom; loving energetic practice, you approach *ren*. Understanding shame, you approach courage. If you

understand these three, you know how to polish your character; knowing how to polish your character, you know how to handle others; knowing how to handle others, you know how to govern a state or clan.”

6. This is another passage which seems to be deficient in the necessary contextual background for solid interpretation. But again, I must differ with Zhuxi's interpretation which reads *shang* 上 as “former times” and its antonym *xia* 下 as “low position.” Since *shang* and *xia* are so clearly contrasted here in consecutive sentences, it seems much more sensible and natural to read them as antonyms. Furthermore, though to read *shang* as “formerly” or “antiquity” may be possible in Classical Chinese, we rarely see it used in that way in the *Analects*, *Great Learning* or *Doctrine of the Mean*. The two terms almost always mean “superior” or “above” and “inferior” or “below,” usually in terms of societal rank, or level of personal enlightenment.